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TESTIMONY

OF

ELMER G. McDANIELS  
MANAGER  
TUMALO IRRIGATION DISTRICT  
BEND, OREGON

ON

H.R 496

THE TUMALO WATER CONSERVATION  
PROJECT ACT OF 2007

SUBMITTED TO

THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER AND POWER

OCTOBER 24, 2007

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Madam Chair, Members of the Subcommittee, I am Elmer G. McDaniels, Manager of the Tumalo Irrigation District in Bend, Oregon. The Tumalo Irrigation District (TID) was founded in 1914 and currently serves about 45 square miles with about 620 patrons and 8,100 irrigated acres between Bend and Sisters, Oregon, on the east slope of the Cascade Mountains.

Deschutes County, where we are located is the second largest water basin in the state. Its natural beauty attracts retirees, tourists and new businesses. Collectively they are transforming the area's economy. The population is expected to nearly double in the next fifteen years thus putting tremendous pressure on the resource base.

The District greatly appreciates the introduction of H.R. 496, the Tumalo Water Conservation Project Act of 2007, by Representative Walden and the opportunity to provide our strong support for the legislation at this hearing. H.R. 496 would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to assist in the planning, design, and construction of the TID Water Conservation Project in Deschutes County, Oregon.

This legislation is vital to our area as we continue to undergo the rapid urbanization and growth that is occurring throughout our part of the State during a period of continuing drought. The District is located in an area that is underlain by highly permeable, fractured basalts. The project that would be constructed under this legislation involves the piping of approximately six miles of open canals, and returning 20cfs of conserved water to in-stream flows under the Oregon State Water Conservation Statute.

The canal seepage that will be conserved by the TID Water Conservation Program project would have entered a regional ground water system that discharges near or into Lake Billy Chinook. The ground water flows in the area are generally parallel to Tumalo Creek. As a result, the canal seepage does not return to Tumalo Creek. This project, when

completed, will result in a major benefit to the Deschutes River by returning flows, which is why we know of no opposition to it in the area.

Under the recent settlement agreement for the Pelton Round Butte Hydroelectric Project, located in our basin, the mitigation required for the new license included reintroduction of ESA-listed steelhead into the Crooked and Deschutes River. It has been fifty years since waters upstream from Pelton Dam have seen summer steelhead. Historically this was an important summer spawning area for the steelhead salmon. Though not a party to that settlement, our willingness to provide 20cfs instream includes 11.2cfs of water from Tumalo Creek, an especially cold water tributary to the temperature challenged Deschutes River will greatly improve the environment for the spawning fish according to the fisheries experts.

There are additional benefits of this particular water conservation project such as eliminating water loss, enhancing public safety, and conserving energy along the project's six-mile length. The completed project, including other work by TID, will deliver pressurized water to TID irrigators during drought years, whereas they now receive an inadequate water supply in 8 out of 10 years. From a watershed enhancement perspective, this project is to provide significant in-stream flow benefits, as noted above, to both Tumalo Creek and the Deschutes River, a major tributary to the Columbia River, draining much of central Oregon. The Middle Deschutes River in the recent past has been reduced to seasonal flows as low as 30cfs.

As I have indicated, the TID Water Conservation Project will provide a 20cfs water savings to transfer to in-stream in the Tumalo Creek and the Deschutes River. Together with previous TID water conservation efforts, this represents 10.4% of the 250cfs basin goal (set by the State Fish and Wildlife Agency and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) for restoring the Deschutes River, which will greatly benefit stream ecosystem and habitat for listed species as well as provide flow stability for both anadromous fisheries and resident species.

The completed project will eliminate or reduce farm pumping systems thereby saving energy, realize pressurization throughout the irrigation systems, and reduce the risk of injury and drowning to small children growing up in our District around open canals as well as provide a measure of fire protection because of the ability to tap into a pressurized pipeline system.

The Tumalo Irrigation District, even though it is a non-Federal Reclamation District, has a history of working with the Bureau on solutions. The Federal and State interest in having this project constructed becomes apparent given the need for solutions in the Deschutes basin for addressing in-stream flow, anadromous fish, and environmental issues. The TID has recently spent over \$3 million of its own resources in piping projects in the District, including participation in the Bend Feed Canal Project. The District does not have cash on hand to undertake this project without Federal assistance. With only 620 patrons the ability of the District to increase rates to fully fund the project is not feasible. We view the work that would be undertaken with this project as a model that the Bureau should consider for their own projects, and see it as consistent with their Water 2025 Program.

We support the cost-sharing called for under the legislation recognizing the Federal fiscal constraints for the Bureau of Reclamation program. We believe H.R. 496 offers a District such as ours the opportunity to undertake a project having so many positive benefits including: water conservation savings, watershed enhancement, protection of listed species, and a reliable water supply to our service area customers during the drought while increasing the public safety of our communities and continuing to be responsible environmental stewards and good neighbors with our fellow Reclamation and Non-Reclamation Districts in the Deschutes Basin.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement for the hearing record on such an important piece of legislation for our District. And thank you again to Representative Walden for his assistance. We look forward to favorable action by the full U.S. House of Representatives on this legislation.